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WHO WAS THE FIRST WESTERNER IN KOREA?

Father Gregorio de Cespedes.

Samuel H. Moffett

Part I

A Portuguese ship captain may well have been the first European to see Korea. Domingos Monteiro, plying the sea route between Japan and Portugal via Goa in one of the famous "Great Ships" of the Orient trade, was almost shipwrecked, perhaps on Cheju-do, sometime between 1576 and 1578, and described a "wild coast" he glimpsed in the teeth of the storm.¹ He did not touch Korean soil, however. The first Westerner actually to land in Korea is generally considered to be the Spanish priest, Father Gregorio de Cespedes, in 1593. This was thirty years before the Dutchman, Jan Janse Weltevree, was captured and abandoned on the Korean coast in 1627, and two hundred and forty-three years before any other European priest could penetrate "the Hermit Kingdom."

But I wonder if de Cespedes was really Korea's first Western visitor. There is a tantalizing reference in a rare Korean document to a shadowy figure described as a "Westerner" who came in 1582, eleven years before de Cespedes. His name is given as "a certain Ma-ri, a Westerner shipwrecked in our country on Cheju island and sent on to China." The account is contained in the *Yak-p'o-chip*, the Records of Chong T'ak (whose pen-name was Yak-p'o). In 1582, the fifteenth year of King Sonjo, Chong T'ak led the annual embassy to the court of Peking, and with him went the "Westerner". It was Chong T'ak, incidentally, who, a decade

later, stood alone at the Korean court to defend the great admiral Yi Sun-sin against his detractors, thereby saving him from probable execution.² Unfortunately, the description of the mysterious Ma-ri is ambiguous. "Westerner" (*soyang-guk-in*) does not necessarily mean European in such early Korean writings. The word is also used sometimes of foreigners from southeast Asia. But the name, Ma Ri, and the clothes—the man is described as dressed in black—hint of the Catholic priesthood. Whoever he was, Ma was received with courtesy and escorted safely to Peking. I like to think that he was indeed a European and that Korea's first contact with the West was thus dignified by respect and courtesy on both sides, marred neither by the presence of an invading army, as with de Cespedes, nor by the indignities of imprisonment as with Hendrik Hamel, a half a century later.

Meanwhile, however, unless more can be discovered of the elusive Ma Ri-I, Father de Cespedes must be acknowledged as the first known Westerner in Korea. He came in troubled times and in unlikely company. How did a 42-year-old Spaniard of the Company of Jesus ever find himself on the other side of the world, entering an unknown, unmapped land, with the ravaging Japanese armies of a pagan military genius, Hideyoshi?

Just about everything that is known of Father Gregorio de Cespedes in Korea has been collected from primary sources by Ralph Cory, once of the United States Embassy in Seoul, and tragically killed on Guadalcanal in World War II. In 1936 he presented his findings in a paper before the Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch. This appeared the next year in the *Transactions* (vol. 27), as "Some Notes on Father Gregorio de Cespedes, Korea's First European Visitor"³ It includes the full text of the only two

2. See also *Yak P'o Chip* (Records of Yak Po.) This is the pen-name of Chong T'ak.

3. Ralph Cory, *Transactions* of the R.A.S., Korea Branch, vol. 27, pp. 1-55. This is the principal source for information on de Cespedes, and I use it heavily in what follows.

1. C.R. Boxer, *Fidalgos in the Far East: 1550-1770*. Hague, 1948.

letters known to have been written by the priest from Korea, presumably in 1594.

Father de Cespedes was born in Madrid in 1551, and entered the newly formed order of Jesuits when he was only eighteen. He was sent to Goa, the Portuguese outpost in India, about 1574, finishing his theological studies there and being admitted to the priesthood in 1575. Two years later he went to Japan which had been opened to Christianity only twenty-eight years earlier by the great Francis Xavier. Perhaps, but not likely, he sailed on the same Great Ship, or carrack, from which Monteiro caught his pioneering glimpse of the Korean coast.

Father de Cespedes arrived in the midst of the golden years of what has been called the "Christian Century in Japan", the years 1549 to 1650. Within two years of his arrival de Cespedes was writing confidently to Rome from Kyoto of "great hope" that "the greater part of (the) kingdom" would follow Ota Nobunaga, unifier of Japan, into the Christian faith. Nobunaga, of course, though a great persecutor of Buddhists, never did become Christian. Nevertheless, for a short time toward the end of the 16th century during de Cespedes' ministry there, it seemed not impossible that Japan might become Christian. The percentage of Christians in the Japanese population was higher then than it is today, three centuries later.

About the year 1585 Father de Cespedes was appointed Superior of the Seminary in Osaka which had been built earlier near Kyoto as one of two centers for training priests from among the sons of the nobility.⁴ Osaka was the home of Hideyoshi, successor to Nobunaga. There is an engaging story told in some histories about a visit paid one day to the seminary by the great conqueror himself. Hideyoshi apparently knew Father de Cespedes rather well, and spoke to him at some length about the Christian faith, admitting that it had a considerable appeal to him. But there

4. J. Laures, *The Catholic Church in Japan*, pp. 104, 112.

was one fatal obstacle. "Everything in your law contents me," said Hideyoshi to de Cespedes, "and I find no other difficulty in it except one: its insistence that a man should have only one wife. Were it not for that I would become a Christian at once."⁵

We do not know why, but de Cespedes did not stay long at the seminary. It may have been that he was a better linguist and preacher than administrator. He had a reputation of great fluency in Japanese. At any rate, by 1588 he had been transferred from Osaka to the southern island of Kyushu where the church was growing so phenomenally fast that missionaries well versed in the language were urgently needed. Already nearly one half of Kyushu was reported to be ruled by Christian lords,⁶ and in those feudal days the people traditionally followed the faith of their daimyo. For the next few years the Spanish priest worked with great success in Nagasaki and Arima, both strong Catholic centers. Nagasaki, in fact, had not long before been turned over for a while as an outright gift to the Jesuit order by its owner, the converted daimyo of Omura, and Omura's Christian son and heir, as we shall see, was very soon to be in Korea at the head of 1,000 soldiers, most of them Christians.⁷

It was this rapid spread of the faith among the nobility and their retainers, particularly in Kyushu, that led indirectly to the coming of de Cespedes to Korea. When Hideyoshi, in 1592, sent nine of the sixteen divisions of his army plunging across the straits to crush Korea, some of the men he picked to lead his best divisions were Christians. The most famous one was Konishi Yukinaga, "the chivalrous Christian daimyo", as C.R. Boxer describes him.⁸ Konishi was commander of the vanguard, the first division on the beach in Korea, and a military genius who

5. Paraphrased from Murdoch, *History of Japan*, Vol. 2. Kobe 1904.

6. Laures, *op. cit.* p. 115f.

7. The father was Omura Sumitada, called Dom Bartholomeu (1532-1587) by the Jesuits; the son, Omura Yoshiaki, Dom Sancho (1568-1615).

8. C.R. Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan: 1549-1650*. p. 180.

from Pusan fought his way into Seoul in two weeks, and the next month, June, took Pyongyang in another two weeks. Four of Konishi's brigade commanders were also Christian, as were most of his 18,000 men. These included Omura, and So, the daimyo of the island of Tsushima, between Japan and Korea.⁹

The devastations of the Hideyoshi invasions (known in Korea as the Imjin-waeran dwarf war of the year of the dragon) are too well known to need recounting here, except perhaps to point out some intriguing parallels to the Korean War of our own times. In both there is the lightning strike north, to the Tumen in 1592, to the Yalu in 1950. In both, after the thrust north, came the entry of the Chinese, and a punishing retreat. In both, there is a Pusan perimeter. But here the likeness ends. The Hideyoshi campaigns were invasions from the south; the communists invaded from the north. The Chinese then were allies, not enemies, and in the sixteenth century it was not so much the entry of the Chinese that forced retreat. The land war soon ground to a bruising stalemate between the Chinese and Japanese armies. The decisive factor, as it turned out, was the Korean navy. A Japanese historian ruefully puts it this way: in the water the Japanese tiger was no match for the Korean shark.¹⁰ Ravaged on land, Korea fought back at sea, and with his lifeline to Japan cut, Konishi drew back his forces to find protection in a ring of fortresses strung along Korea's lower coast.

Here the Japanese army faced a grim winter in 1593. It was composed mostly of soldiers from the warm belt of southern Japan. Short of food, sick and shivering in the biting Korean cold they were dispirited and weary after a year and a half of inconclusive war. One third of the men in the advanced combat divisions had been killed. It may well have been in an effort to raise their sagging morale that the Christian general, Konishi,

9. Cory, *op. cit.*

10. Y.S. Kono, *Japanese Expansion on the Asiatic Continent*, p.153.

decided to send for a priest "to come and console them in their exile".

This is how Father Gregorio de Cespedes achieved the distinction of becoming the first known European to land in Korea. He arrived on December 27, 1593.

Part II

It was three hundred and eighty years ago that the West's first identifiable visitor to Korea, the Jesuit priest de Cespedes, landed at a little fishing port near what is now Chinhae. The date was Dec. 27, 1593, two days after Christmas. Some say it was 1594 (Guzman), or even 1597 (Henthorn), but Ralph Cory, in his indispensable R.A.S. Transactions article on de Cespedes (vol. 27) convinces me to incline toward the earlier date.¹¹

There is some question also about the place de Cespedes landed. In his own letters describing the arrival he simply says he came to "Komangai fortress. This is, of course, a Japanese, not a Korean name, for the fort was one of a string of defensive positions the Japanese had rushed to completion along the south coast during their reverses in the second year of the Hideyoshi invasions. A Japanese history teacher living in Seoul in 1937 identified Komangai for Cory as the present Ungch'on (熊川), in South Kyungsang province. Wondering if there might be any local corroborating evidence remaining on the site itself, a few years ago my wife and I, with the John Browns of Australia, drove eastwards along the coast from Masan in search of the historic spot where, possibly, a Westerner first touched Korean soil.

We came into Ungch'on myon at noon, after a dusty ride twelve kilometers past Chinhae over a pass and down into a little crossroads village in a wide valley. A road branched off to the

11. Ralph Cory, *op. cit.* The quotations below from de Cespedes' two letters from Korea are all taken from Cory's article, which gives the texts in full.

right a mile or so to the sea, and sure enough, there on a high flat-topped ridge dominating the valley on one side and the coast on the other were the unmistakeable remains of a walled fort. Across the valley landward were other evidences of fortifications. "For one league around there are various fortresses," de Céspedes had written in his first letter from Korea, and in every way Ungch'on seemed to fit his description of Komangai, the "high and craggy slope" of the upper fortress, the stone walls of old houses at the foot "for the chiefs".

Not much remains, however, of the "impregnable fortress" he described. "They have built high walls, watch towers and strong bestions," he wrote, "at the foot of which all the nobles and soldiers of Augustin [General Konishi] are encamped". Today only a tumble of walls remains, and a few great, shaped stones overgrown with bushes to mark that earlier, short, unhappy Japanese occupation of the Korean coast.

There on the rocky beach de Céspedes landed, tired and cold after a difficult voyage from Japan. He had celebrated Christmas in the straw-roofed home of a fisherman on the island of Tsushima. The daimyo of Tsushima, So Yoshitomo, was a recent convert, married to General Konishi's daughter, Marie, and though he was already in Korea, fighting under the banner of his father-in-law, his subjects received the foreign priest gladly and entertained him for a busy stay of eighteen days. De Céspedes was accompanied by a Japanese colleague, a "brother named Foucan Eion."

Four days before Christmas they had tried to sail to Korea with a flotilla of sixty ships but were driven back by a typhoon. "The night being very dark," he wrote, "we did not know where we were going and the waves were so high that we could not use our oars, so we put up our sails and went where the wind carried us, in danger of being thrown on a sand bank." Daybreak found them, frightened but safe, back where they had

started. Two days after Christmas they tried again, and this time were successful, though they were blown off course and had to make a first landing "ten or twelve leagues" from Komangai, to which they rowed their little craft the next day.

The priest was met at the beach with great curtesy. Konishi was absent on a mission, but had apparently left instructions for the reception of the foreigner. A horse was sent at once to bring de Céspedes to the fort which was full of Catholic lords Amakusa Arima, Hirado, Goto, and the two sons of the Christian daimyo of Omura, lord of the region around Nagasaki. Hardened campaigners and powerful battalion commanders though they were, they crowded in to welcome the gentle Jesuit to their beleaguered fort.

De Céspedes inquired about the progress of the war and was met with discouraging news. "Peace does not seem to be heading towards a conclusion," he wrote. He had arrived at a time when both China and Japan, their resources drained by months of inconclusive war, were groping for a way to end it without loss of face for either side. Korea, of course, longed to be rid of them both. But peace was as elusive in Korea than as in Vietnam now. De Céspedes naturally blamed the Chinese, not his friend Konishi, who was the chief Japanese negotiator. The Chinese negotiator, Yequiqui (沈惟敬) seems to have promised more than the Chinese wish to concede," he wrote. Yequiqui was replaced, but the tortuous talks towards a settlement were to dron for five more weary years.

In the meantime the Japanese armies nursed their wounds behind the walls of their beachhead fortresses, and Christian commanders among the Japanese looked to the newly arrived chaplain to raise the flagging spirits of their men. It was a formidable task. "These Christians are very poor, and suffer from hunger, cold, illness and other inconveniences," de Céspedes wrote, adding an oblique tribute to the effectiveness of the Korean Admiral Yi Sunsin's

famous naval blockade.

"Although Hideyoshi sends food, so little reaches here," he wrote, "that it is impossible to sustain all with them, and moreover the help that comes from Japan is insufficient and comes late. It is now two months since ships have come, and many craft were lost."

De Cespedes has disappointingly little to say of Korea as a country except to complain about the weather. "The cold... is very severe... All day long my limbs are half benumbed, and in the morning, I can hardly raise my hands to say mass." But without delay he set about the work to which he had been called. Three of the most important fortresses were commanded by Christians: Konishi at headquarters in Comangai, with his son-in-law of Tsushima only a league away managing to live in his military outpost in a state of luxury that awed the simple priest. "I was astonished to see the beautiful things he has, as if (he) intended to stay there all (his) life... many war adjets and golden screens; not even his father-in-law could equal him." The third Christian center in the Japanese army was the fortress of the daimyo of Buzen, Simon Kuroda.

These three forts became the focus of de Cespedes' labors in Korea. He toiled up and down the steep slopes of the mountain forts even at night to hear confessions. He preached constantly and baptized in great numbers for a whole year and a half,¹² until finally the white-hot rivalry building up between Hideyoshi's two chief lieutenants, the Christian Konishi and the Buddhist Kato, caught de Cespedes in the middle and forced his return to Japan. Not much is known of his later years. We catch a glimpse of him in Shimabara, writing to a Jesuit friend in Mexico. His church was still growing. In his own parish alone, he said, he

12. Some historians think de Cespedes was in Korea only a few months. See Steichen, *The Christian Daimyos*, Tokyo, 1903. There is a remote possibility that he returned briefly in 1597, says Cory, *op. cit.*, p.20.

ministered to fifteen or sixteen thousand Japanese Christians. But there were intimations of troubles ahead. "The tyrant" Hideyoshi had turned against the Christians; twenty-six Catholics had been crucified in Nagasaki, and de Cespedes too longed for a martyr's crown, "that with most exquisite torments I may give my life."

It is rather sad that this devout and faithful man was denied both the immediate honor for which he prayed, martyrdom, and another honor which he was too modest to claim and too limited by circumstances to earn, that of being the first Christian missionary of Korea. He died in 1611 from apoplexy, after thirty-four years in Japan. And as far as we know, he met no Koreans in Korea.

As we left the ruins of the old fortress and turned back to Masan, we stopped for a moment at a little Catholic chapel in Ungchon, still looking for traces of de Cespedes. Surely, I thought, there will be some memorial here to the first Christian in Korea. But there was no priest there, only a sexton, and he had never heard of de Cespedes. Sad, but not altogether wrong. After all, de Cespedes was never really in Korea. He was only in Japanese forts, utterly caught off from contact with the real Korea by the savage scorched earth policy of the Korean defenders and their implacable hatred of the invaders. He was not the founder of the Korean church; and not even a missionary to Korea; he was a chaplain to Japanese troops, and what he was called to do he did very well indeed. But that is all.

There is, however, one illuminating, redeeming footnote that must be added to the story. On his way back to Japan in 1595 de Cespedes stopped again on the island of Tsushima and found that General Konishi had sent two captive Korean boys of noble birth to his daughter, Marie, wife of the daimyo, and had asked that they be treated not as prisoners, but be given to the Church. De Cespedes took one of them with him to Japan, says Cory; baptized him as Vincent and put him in the seminary. His Korean name

is given as Caoun-probably an Andong Kwon. For a while the Jesuits dreamed that he might be the key to a more propitious return to Korea, this time not with invaders, but with a returning prisoner of war. In 1614 they sent him to Peking, hoping he could make his way home from there across the Yalu, but it was not to be. He returned to Japan, where, in 1625 he was arrested at Shimabara and burned at the stake in Nagasaki in the persecutions of 1626. Thus, in the end, de Cespedes earned all the honor he needs through Victor Kwon, the boy he helped to rescue, one of the earliest of Korean Christians, and Korean martyrs.¹³⁾

13. Johannes Laures, "Koreanische Martyrer in Japan", in *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft*. (Munster) XL No.4, (1956). pp. 282-287.

似而非 宗派에 對한 綜合的 考察 評價

김 규 당

머 리 말

오늘날 기독교회를 혼란케 하는 요인들 중에 두드러지게 나타나고 있는 것은 정체를 알 수 없는 사이비한 군소 신학교들의 난립과 또한 사이비 종파의 극성이다. 신앙 자유를 인정하는 민주국가에서 사이비한 신앙활동을 통제하기는 심히 어렵게 되었다. 신앙통제는 정부나 교계에서 마찬가지로 어려운 문제라고 본다. 그러나 사이비 종파에 대한 관제는 유일종교를 주장하는 기독교의 처지와 정부의 처지는 같지 않은 것이다. 정부의 처지로서는 사이비 종파들이 사회악을 저지르지 않는한 그대로 내버려둘 수 밖에 없다. 그러나 우리 기독교의 처지에서는 사이비종파의 사이비성을 규명하고, 기성교인들로 거기에 넘어가지 않도록 철저한 대비를 하지 않으면 안된다. 최근 우리 사회에 큰 물의를 일으켰던 동방교의 경우를 볼때 무엇보다도 우리 장로 교회에서 논란 것은 그같은 범죄단체, 폭력단체가 빠졌하든 “대한 기독교 개혁장로교회”라는 간판을 걸고 장로교회 행세를 해왔다는 것이다. 우리 교직자가 지도하는 순수한 양떼들이 그 간판을 잘못 알고 걸려들기 쉽게 되었으니 말이다.

지금 기성교회들에서 사이비 종파를 경계해야 될 이유로서는 첫째 사이비 종파를 경계하는 것이 주님의 명령을 준수함이 되기 때문이다. 마태 24:24에 주께서 경고하기를 “그때에 거짓 그리스도들과 거짓 선지자들이 일어나 큰 표적과 기사를 보이어 할 수만 있으면 택하신 자라도 미혹하게 하리라 보라 내가 너희에게 말하노라” 했다. 또한 딤후 4:1에는 경고하기를 “성령이 밝히 말씀하시기를 후일에 어떤 사람들이 믿음에서 떠나 미혹하게 하는 귀신의 가르침을 좇으리라”고 했다. 또 둘째로 기성교회들이 사이비 종파들을 경계할 이유는 사이비종파들은 불신자를 상대함보다는 기성교인들에게 마수를 뻗치기 때문이다. 교직자들이 특별히 잘 돌보지 않으면 기성교인들을 잃어 버리기 쉽게 되었다. 그것은 수년전 박태선의 전도관 운동에서 잘 볼 수 있었다. 그때에 가장 피해를 많이 본 교회가 장로교회다. 또 셋째로

1973

教會와神學

제 VI 집

■ 특 집 : 한 국 교 회 사

長老會神學大學